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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the comparative effects of homogeneous versus heterogeneous ability grouping on the reading achievement of slow learners in the first two elementary grades. Pretest and posttest scores obtained on the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Tests indicated that the type of grouping had no effect on the reading readiness achievement of slow learners. However, some differences between the two groups were noted, and further research using a larger sample and supplementary reading materials, and having more time allotted for the research, may result in significant findings. (Author/WP)

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The Effects of Ability Grouping on the Reading Achievement of Slow Learners

Earl J. Ogletree

Introduction

The grouping of children in classes according to ability-achievement measures was relatively common in urban American schools during the 1920's and has since been a source of debate among educators.

> Considering the amount and duration of interest in ability grouping, it might be thought that the issue would be settled by now, having been either adopted as a successful measure or discarded as ineffective. Research results have been, at best, inconclusive.[1]

The growing number of students and the accompanying wider range of abilities have increased the administrative problems involved in providing a learning climate that is both compatible and challenging. There may be a spread of three our four grade levels at the fourth grade level in reading achievement. Reading is the foundation for successful school learning. There is a critical need to improve the teaching of reading in both the elementary and secondary schools. The success of reading instruction is said to be influenced by the grouping of children by ability achievement, age and intelligence. The slow learner constitutes a particular problem. While the slow learner deviates from the norm, ability grouping and individualized instruction may be a solution to increasing his reading achievement.

Studies by Baines[2], Stouffer[3] and Barthelmess and Boyer,[4] found that disadvantaged children and slowers showed significant increase in readings skills when grouped by ability. On the other hand, Cartwright and McIntosh[5] who studied the effects of three

different grouping procedures (heterogeneous, homogeneous and flexible) on the reading achievement of 260 disadvantaged primary school children, at the end of the two year period, they found no significant difference in reading achievement between the three groups. Research findings gave no definite indication as to the effectiveness of ability grouping on reading achievement. Yet, there is a definite need for research on the effects of ability grouping on slow learners in the urban schools. Does homogeneous ability grouping result in slow learner's performance which is superior to the slow learner's performance resulting from heterogeneous grouping? What effects may ability grouping have on the slow learner's reading achievement?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the comparative effects of homogeneous versus heterogeneous ability grouping on the reading achievement of slow learner, in two first grade classrooms.

Design of the Study

The sample of eighteen slow learners was randomly selected from two first grade classes with a total population of fifty-five students from the Sams Elementary School. The school is located in a black residential community on the westside of Chicago. The study was carried out over a ten-month period (May 1972- March 1973). The homogeneous group, consisted of one self-contained classroom with twenty-seven slow learners placed in the class on the basis of intellectual ability and academic achievement in reading. A sample of nine pupils were randomly selected from this homogeneous

group and matched with a sample of nine pupils from the heterogeneous group.

The heterogeneous group, consisted of one self-contained classroom with twenty-eight pupils placed in the class on the basis of intellectual ability and academic acheivement in reading. Nineteen pupils of group B were considered average and high achievers in reading based on the scores obtained on the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Tests. For experimental purposes, nine slow learners were placed with ten average achievers and nine high achievers to form the total population of twenty-eight pupils.

The sample of nine slow learners in the homogeneous group and the nine slow learners in the heterogeneous group were selected and matched according to, a) the scores obtained on the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Tests-Form B, b) I.Q. data, c) socio-economic level and d) sex.

Both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups were taught in self-contained classrooms. The Basal Reading Series, Emmett A. Betts and Corloyn M. Welch was used for reading instruction in both groups, with close adherance to the instructions contained in the teacher's manuals. The allotted time for reading instruction was twenty minutes in the afternoon each school day for both the experimental and control group. The same reading plan format was followed by each teacher during reading instruction. The time allotted for the other subject areas and the materials employed were the same. The statement of "Philosophy for the Chicago Public Schools" and the "Guiding Principles of Learning" were placed in

each teacher's lesson plan book with the expectancy of being used by each teacher. The pupils in both the experimental and control groups were given praise for their accomplishments. The pupils evaluated their own work individually and collectively during the reading period.

The Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test, forms A and B were administered on a pre and posttest basis. The analysis of covariance was used to test the significance of differences between the means of the two groups.

Findings:

The findings indicated that there was no significant difference between the means and standard deviation of the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups on the pretest.

TABLE I

Pretest results of the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups obtained on the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test-Form B.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Homogeneous	9	31	1.49
Heterogeneous	9	29	1.56

The two groups were closely matched in reading achievement readiness.

The posttest results also indicated no significant difference in the two groups as result of the heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping.

Table II shows the results of the posttest given at the end of the ten month period, March 1973. The mean score of 47 for the

homogeneous group shows a gain of eleven points compared to the pretest mean score of 31. and a gain of nine points for the control group.

TABLE 11

Postest results of the homogeneous and heterogeneous groups obtained onthe Metropolitan Reading Test- Form A.

Homogeneous			Heterogeneous			F-ratio
N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	2.52
9	42	3.68	9	38	3.61	

The standard deviations for both groups increased. The standard deviation of 3.68 for the homogeneous group shows a gain of 2.19 compared to the standard deviation on the pretest of 1.49. The standard deviation of 3.16 for the heterogeneous group shows a gain of 2.05 compared to the pretest standard deviation of 1.56. Although slow learners in the homogeneous group in this study tended to demonstrate higher achievement than corresponding children in the heterogeneous group, the difference was not found to be statistically significant, using the .05 level of confidence. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the scores obtained on the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Tests when slow learners are grouped either heterogeneously or homogeneously was accepted. Hence, the type of grouping used in this study appeared to have no effect on reading readiness achievement of slow learners.

Summary & Conclusion

This study attempted to answer the question, "Does homogeneous grouping effect the reading achievement of slow learners?". The findings of no significant difference in reading achievement as

effected by grouping organization are similar to those of Goldberg,[6] et.al. She found that reading achievement is influenced more strongly by teacher and group differences in individual classrooms than by ability range of the class. It was concluded that variations in the ability level, the ability range, and the position of individual pupils within the ability range in the classroom has little effect upon pupil achievement.

The time period for this study was critical. The grouping of the children for the 1972-1973 school year had to be done in June, 1972. The researcher was not allowed to start in September to pretest the children. The children had to be placed in their respective classrooms at the beginning of the school year in order that pertinent attendance data and records be filled out correctly. The effects of other variables such as summer vacations, home environments, and traveling experiences during the summer months could not be controlled by the investigator. In the middle of the school year, there was the longest teachers' strike in Chicago's history which lasted for two and one-half weeks. This was a variable which the researcher had not anticipated.

Although the findings were not statistically significant, the researcher noted these differences between the two groups.

1. the mean of the homogeneous group was higher than the mean of the heterogeneous group.
2. the slow learners in the homogeneous group tended to demonstrate higher achievement in reading readiness than corresponding children in the heterogeneous group.

The homogeneous group members began reading in the first grade basal reading series, Around Green Hills near the end of this study. The heterogeneous group members began reading the primer, Up the Street and Down. The teacher for the control group felt that the children were not able to keep the pace designed in reading format. Some children did not acquire the skills necessary to proceed to a new unit in reading instruction. The teacher for the control group found it necessary to decrease the allotted time for reading instruction and reteach certain skills. This shorter instructional period may be important in interpreting the scores.

They study by Drews[7] of 432 ninth-grade students produced no significant differences in achievement as measured by achievement tests, between homogeneously and heterogeneously placed slow students during the school year. Drews states,

"Although we cannot pretend to describe all the dimensions of classroom learning, we feel that there are distinct and important kinds of productivity that students at different ability levels achieve with appropriate challenge and freedom."

The sample of eighteen first grade students in this study was very small when compared to the total number of students in Drew's study.

Similar to the study by Baines on the effects of grouping children for reading instruction, the children in this study were from a disadvantaged background. Baines study allowed the students to progress at their own pace under the same teacher from first through second grade. His findings suggested that grouping

disadvantaged children for instructional purposes, using supplementary readiness materials and keeping them with the same teacher for two years, improved significantly their chances for progress in grade one and grade two. This study of eighteen slow learners did not allow the student to progress at his own pace in reading. The findings in this study might have been significant if the pupils are allowed to stay with their same teachers through the second grade.

There is a need for further research concerning the effects of ability grouping on the reading achievement of slow learners. Having a larger sample, using supplementary readiness materials, and having more time allotted for the research may result in significant findings in future research in this area.

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